

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**BEAVERHEAD SNOWRIDERS SNOWMOBILE GROOMING GRANT**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

January 14, 1997

**PROPOSAL**

The proposed action is for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to award the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club a grant to continue grooming the existing trails and roads designated for snowmobile use in the Dillon area. FWP has maintained a trail grooming agreement with the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club for several years.

Prior to any further granting of snowmobile grooming funds, FWP completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address those issues outlined under the Montana Snowmobile Grant Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). This assessment reviewed what, if any, impacts the groomed trails have on the human and natural environment and presented reasonable measures through a public awareness plan to mitigate identified impacts.

**MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS**

FWP is required by the Montana Environment Policy Act (MEPA) to assess impacts to the human and natural environment. The Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club grooming proposal and its impacts were documented by FWP in an EA to comply with MEPA. The Montana Snowmobile Grant PEIS was reviewed to determine the issues to be addressed in the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Grant EA.

Public comments were solicited for 30 days from November 4 through December 3, 1996. Legal notices regarding the proposed action were printed in area newspapers and listed on the state's electronic bulletin board. Approximately 27 copies of the EA were mailed out to FWP's standard distribution list and interested parties.

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received eleven letters during the comment period. The comment received during the public comment period was reviewed and noted. A number of the of the letters received contained comments that were determined to be outside the scope of the environmental assessment process. The majority of the comments supported the proposed action. A summary of the comments follows.

Ten of the written comments were supportive of the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club's grooming proposal. A number of the written comments emphasized the importance of maintaining public access, and motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. A number of comments stressed the importance of maintaining and preserving a family and socially oriented activity such as snowmobiling.

One written comment was received from the Montana Wilderness Association expressing concern about the impact of snowmobile grooming activities on wildlife and Forest Service land management activities. Fish, Wildlife and Parks will respond in summary form to this concern.

*Beaver head*

## **FOREST SERVICE LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

FWP administers a grant program for snowmobile trail grooming activities. The PEIS and EA are intended to provide MEPA compliance for the snowmobile trail grooming grant program. The PEIS requires as a prerequisite for trail grooming funding, that those trails on federal land be covered by appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. The Beaverhead Forest has communicated to FWP that the use of federal lands, as proposed in the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club grooming project, is in compliance with NEPA. For the scope of this EA, FWP must depend on the determination made by the Forest Service. Limiting off road / trail use by snowmobiles and the designation of play areas is outside the scope of the Snowmobile Grooming Grant Program PEIS.

## **WILDLIFE**

Under the PEIS several measures are available to the agencies that are designed to protect habitat and preserve natural behavioral traits and population distributions. The measures are designed to reduce impacts from the establishment of trails under the Snowmobile Grant Program. Most of the following mitigation measures would be accomplished through a strategic signing, education and enforcement program. The Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Grant EA incorporates a public awareness plan to mitigate the impacts to wildlife, through education and trail signing.

## **SUMMARY OF REVIEW**

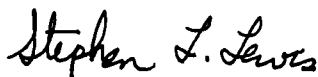
No significant issues were identified or generated during the EA review and public comment period to trigger further review.

## **DECISION NOTICE**

FWP's analysis supports preserving the existing Beaverhead Snowriders grooming program, with stipulations identified in the public awareness plan. A tradition of public recreation has developed in the Dillon area over many years. A state grooming grant will guarantee a continued joint commitment of FWP, USFS, and the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club to promote resource protection and ethical public land use.

**After review of this proposal it is my intention to accept the EA with mitigation measures addressed in the public awareness plan as the final EA and to award the Beaverhead Snowriders Snowmobile Club a grant to continue grooming the existing trails and roads designated for snowmobile use.**

The Final EA may be viewed at or obtained upon request from the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, at the Region 3 Headquarters in Bozeman (994-4042), The Helena Area Resource Office (449-8864), and the Butte Area Resource Office (494-1952).



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